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ABSTRACT

This paper explores possibilities within a paradigm that is an alternative to the reductionist, mechanistic paradigm of school-based management. The use of a "sporting team" concept (from a dynamic, holistic paradigm) rather than a "ship's crew" model (from a reductionist approach) is advocated. Using research on the governance of independent Australian schools, a prima facie case is developed to show that schools do not become self-managing, autonomous entities merely by the appointment of school councils. When viewed from a dynamic systems paradigm, schools are seen to be by nature self-managing and autonomous. The appointment of a school council enables a school to become self-managing at a qualitatively different, second-order level of functioning. The self-referential processes of a school, such as the stabilizing structures of expectations, are explored to help administrators and decision makers participate in those processes with understanding. (Contains 24 references.) (LMI)

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THE SELF-MANAGING SCHOOL: A MATTER OF BEING *AND* OF BECOMING.

Paper for
The 7th Regional Conference
of
Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration
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1992

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"Self-organization is pervasive in nature."
--Francisco Varela (in von Foerster, 1981xiv)

"One must understand the true nature of the object to be managed"
-- Ulrich (1984 80)

ABSTRACT:

It is claimed that "school-based management" is a development of the 1980s that has captured the attention of a wide audience and presents challenges for the future. Books such as The Self-Managing School (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988) have been hailed as "essential reading . . . [for] all school principals", and particularly for those in centralized school systems which are following the trend of Western countries where self-management is being promoted as a means of reducing "the escalating costs of central and regional bureaucracies" (Millikan, Journal of Educational Administration, 27(1), 1989). But the notion of "self-management" that is generally promoted ("local control" rather than "centralized control") is claimed to belong within a particular paradigm (a reductionist, mechanistic paradigm), and it is the purpose of this paper to explore other possibilities within an alternative paradigm.

Using some research involving the governance of independent schools, a prima facie case is developed to show that schools (even if part of a centralized system) do not become self-managing, autonomous entities merely by the appointment of school councils. When viewed from within a dynamic systems paradigm, they are seen to be by nature *self-managing and autonomous. The appointment of a school council enables a school to become self-managing at a qualitatively different level (a second-order) of functioning.*

Schools both are *and* become *self-managing, and the key is to know how to tap into that phenomenon. The paper explores the self-referential processes of a school so that administrators and decision-makers, at whatever level, can participate in those processes with understanding.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The story is told of the village barber who shaves all in the village who do not shave themselves (clearly those who shave themselves do not need to be shaved). The question is: does the barber shave himself? Naturally the answer is "no" because he only shaves those who do not shave themselves. Apparently, he is not to shave himself. But then, if he doesn't shave himself, . . .

Thankfully, schools are not barber shops (although as the head of a school with hairstyle regulations, I have often considered employing a consultant barber!), and the issue of a school managing itself does not encounter this same kind of problem. Or does it?

Let me stand that paradoxical problem aside for the time being and tell you about City Grammar School (a hypothetical school in a city which you can decide for yourself). It was a very traditional boys' school and it only employed male staff who were called "masters" and whom the boys addressed as "sir". It got a new Headmaster, Stephen Warne, who decided it was time to make some changes; nothing radical, but one change he wanted was for the boys to address staff by name rather than "sir". He decided that the best way to approach the change was to get the boys to call him Mr Warne rather than "sir" and quietly let this filter through the school. But so entrenched was the "sir" habit that nothing changed. The boys still called the other masters "sir" and, only when he pulled them up, did they remember to call him Mr Warne; and other staff who he had encouraged to adopt the "Mr" form of address did not seem to be insisting on it from the boys. It seemed to Stephen Warne that the only thing to do was to bring the subject out into the open, discuss it fully, explain why he wanted to change the style of address and then insist that everyone insist upon the new form. When he raised the subject, however, he discovered, to his dismay, that there was very strong support for a change in form of address, but the preferred new form (from the predominantly young staff) was not to be called Mr X, as he desired it to be, but the use of first names. In fact, so strong were the feelings for that change that this was the form of address that won the day and became the norm for the school! The new Headmaster had managed to change the form of address within the school, but the end result was otherwise than he had intended.

1.1. An Overview

Those two stories have some things to say about self-managing systems as I hope will become clear to you as this paper progresses. But first, let me outline what I propose to put to you. Throughout the 1980s, in a number of countries, including Australia, initiatives have been taken to give schools within publicly-funded centralized systems greater autonomy to make decisions over the allocation of resources. This has been defined as enabling schools to become "self-managing". In particular, the appointment of school councils with representatives of the various "constituencies" of the school (staff, pupils and community) is seen as the ideal way to maximise the benefits of self-management. I propose to argue that while such a move certainly increases the school's ability to manage itself in an ever more complex and contingent environment, the appointment of a school council is not in itself a necessary condition for self-management. All that a council may achieve is a shift in control from one level to another: albeit a more local level. To claim that this enables self-management is only valid within a particular view of schools. A view which I believe precludes a proper understanding of self-management. By reference to some research into the governance of independent schools, I propose to argue that, when viewed from an alternative paradigm, schools are seen to be *by nature* self-managing social systems. They are social systems that are operationally closed systems and that develop for themselves an identity which they are able to maintain autonomously. Whether decisions concerning the allocation of resources are made at the level of a central bureaucracy or at a more local level, does not alter the school's essentially autonomous nature. What is important in that regard is whether the school as a whole accepts the legitimacy of those decisions. If schools are self-managing without school councils, then the question arises: why have schools appointed councils? It is my claim that this is an evolutionary development which allows

schools to operate at a level that better enables them to co-ordinate themselves with their ever-increasingly complex environments.

2. MANAGEMENT

Management is variously defined and not at all a clearly agreed upon concept. For some, management is synonymous with leadership, so that Duignan (1988:11), for example, claims that: "Management well done is leadership in disguise." For others, management and leadership have differing functions to fulfil. Sungaila and Schein, for example, are careful to distinguish between leadership and mere management. Sungaila (1989(a):12) argues that Duignan's view is a denial of the conclusions of scholars over the last three decades, as well as an attempt to deny the problem of a dearth of leadership within organizations. Leadership involves something more than management. Schein (1985:316) is also of the view that "leadership" goes beyond the realm of what is typically meant by "management". Ulrich (1984:80) claims that leadership denotes the "leadership of people" and that leadership in organizations can only mean the "leadership of people *in* organizations." Management, however, in his view, does not have this personal connotation so that it is institutions that are managed and not people.

The Commonwealth Secretariat (1981:37), in their Handbook, *Leadership in the Management of Education*, define management as "the sequence of related processes whereby activities are planned, implemented and monitored in order to achieve the objectives of the organisation as efficiently as possible." This stands in some contrast to Malik and Probst's (1984:118) contention that managers (who presumably are enacting management) are the "catalysts and cultivators" of self-organizing systems in evolving contexts. This implies a far less "rationalistic" approach than that of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

So what can one make of this confusion (where, incidentally, the further complication of the relationship between management and administration has not even been considered). Perhaps one can only complain that the notion of management is itself unmanageable! But I must avoid such a cop-out and indicate how I intend to use the word management in this paper. I want first to distinguish management from leadership. To explain my distinction at this point would presuppose much of this paper so all I can do is to state that when I use the word "management" I do not have in mind "leadership". And I do not intend to define what I mean by "leadership": that too would require a paper in itself. Second, I see the function of management as one of co-ordination. This may include a number of activities such as planning, giving commands, making decisions, but the rationality of these activities may be far removed from that encountered in an application of algorithms or a matching of "means" and "ends".

2.1. Two Views of Management

It has been claimed that generally there are two methods by which human actions can be co-ordinated towards the accomplishment of a common goal (Malik and Probst, 1984:109). These are commonly seen in two particular institutions within society: the *naval ship's crew* and the *sporting team*. In the former, co-ordination is achieved through command and instruction within a hierarchical command structure of officers. There is a strict ordering of relationships and lines of communication. The behaviour of a member of the crew is determined by a chain of commands which ultimately can be traced back to the captain at the helm. In the sporting team, co-ordination is achieved in the context of a polycentric (or heterarchical -- rule by others) system of anticipatory behavioural responses of the persons in the team. Any one can relate to any one else on the team; and any one can take command when he realizes that, because of his position at a particular moment, he knows best what to do. The behaviour of the team members is guided by their relative positions on the field at any time, the rules of the game and the position of the ball. Now the ship's crew and the

sporting team serve as metaphors, and most organizations in society, including schools, will be seen chiefly in terms of the one or the other.

A point I wish to draw to your attention, however, is that these two metaphors belong within two different paradigms. The ship's crew draws attention to linear chains of cause and effect. The use of this metaphor implies the traditional, mechanistic paradigm derived from Newtonian physics, where the world is seen as a machine made up of component parts. Movement in part A "causes" movement in part B which, in turn causes movement in part C. These parts can be isolated and studied in detail, so the whole is reduced to a series of parts. When these are fully understood, then one can understand how the whole fits together and operates. In this sense it is reductionist: always trying to reduce phenomena into more fundamental, less-complex parts which, it is hoped, will contain the ultimate clues as to why the more complex congregations of those parts are as they are. There is an emphasis upon "structure" in the sense of how the parts fit together (what "causes" what "effect"); and an emphasis upon maintaining the proper lines of communication and command. By good "engineering" (or good "captaining"), future states of the "machine" (the "ship") can be predicted and controlled.

The sporting team, on the other hand, implies a process paradigm of dynamic systems which are viewed holistically. The team is an indivisible whole which is something *more* than just the sum of component parts. It can, for the sake of analysis, profitably be broken into parts (or positions on the team) to analyse the function of any particular position or team member, but this is a *practical* reductionism as opposed to the *ontological* reductionism of mechanism. The whole can never be conceived as merely the sum of its parts. There are no linear chains of cause and effect but rather networks of mutual causation. Structures here are dynamic, and are concerned with *process* rather than static configuration. While these dynamic systems are open to their environments in terms of the energy and information they need for their survival, they are closed with respect to their operations which are guided by the "rules of the game". From the point of view of an observer on the side-line, the team possess an autonomy: it is not being controlled by someone at the helm. Indeed, controlling and predicting future states of such complex, dynamic systems is highly problematic if not impossible.

2.2. Self-Management

Let me now turn to the concept of self-management and what that term means. I return to the village barber and his paradoxical problem about shaving himself or not. He would have no such problem if he were not "of the village". His paradox arises precisely because he belongs to the domain in which he functions. If he lived in a neighbouring village, then the question of whether he has to shave himself or not in his role of village barber, does not arise. He no longer belongs within the domain of his functioning. He is only concerned for those *living* within the village. But when he lives within the village in which he functions, he himself becomes caught up in the domain of his own functioning. Now there are many concepts which can be embedded in their own domains or which can be applied to themselves. Consider for example the notion of purpose. If a school has a purpose, then it has a "goal" or an "end". But one may ask the question: What is the purpose of this "purpose"? That is, purpose itself has a purpose, namely, the keeping of those functioning within the school from pursuing activities not directed towards the school's purpose.

Again, consider the notion of thinking. Thinking involves the formation of conceptions in the mind. In making that statement, I have, in fact, been thinking about "thinking", in which case *as thinker* I have conceptualized my own conceptualization. Finally, consider the notion of teaching. This is the fundamental activity of a teacher. But the contemporary notion of a teacher is not merely someone who has knowledge in some particular discipline, but rather someone who has been taught how to teach that knowledge. In other words, we can teach "teaching", which, of course, is the function of teacher training institutions. (It is sometimes argued that the problem with teacher training institutions is

that they do not always recognise that "teaching teaching" also should be applied to itself, and they do not always teach lecturers how to teach "how to teach"!)

Each of these concepts -- "purpose", "thinking", and "teaching" -- are capable of being applied to themselves. Such notions have been called "autologies" (von Foerster, 1984:3). They are meaningful as first-order concepts and can be applied directly. But they are also meaningful as *second-order* concepts and can be applied to themselves before fulfilling their first-order functioning. (The training of the teachers in teacher training institutions is in fact an example of a higher order of functioning.) Autologies can function in their own domains. The significant thing, however, about such autologies is that *the focus of attention changes at the different levels of functioning.* When functioning at the first-order (that is, directly), the attention is upon *the function itself.* When functioning, however, at the second-order (that is, having first been applied to itself), the attention is upon *the one functioning.* In the case of purpose, it shifts from the purpose to the one with a purpose: in the case of thinking, from the process of thinking to the one who thinks about thinking. So the attention has shifted from "something" to "someone", or from "the observed" to "the observer". The observer is now included in the domain of his or her own observations.

Now the question I wish to pose is this: Is the concept of management autological? In particular, within a school, is the "manager" him- or her-self part of the domain of his or her management? I would claim that for the most part, management has not been considered as reflexive but rather only as a first-order concept with the manager somehow independent of the domain being managed. Self-management has either been avoided (on the grounds that self-inclusion leads to paradoxes such as that faced by the village barber) or it simply has not been considered. Management has not been viewed as an autological process so that schools have not been seen as *self-managing* but rather simply as being managed. Principals have been seen as the agents of the central bureaucracies rather than participants within their own domains. This means that the focus of management has been upon control (that is, the observed) rather than upon how the manager (that is, the observer) participates within the system.

This has led to a distorted view of self-management so that the notion of self-management that is generally promoted is not the qualitatively different second-order management, but merely first-order management with different managers. I believe this problem arises because the metaphor we most commonly use for the organization of a school is that of a ship's crew rather than that of the sporting team.

3. THE MECHANISTIC VIEW OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

It would be true to say that much (if not most) contemporary research in educational administration has been conceived within a mechanistic paradigm. The emphasis is to investigate how the person at the helm, or in the more democratic mode, the people (the school council) at the helm, can gain better control of the system; how to avoid "crisis" management; how to make better decisions; and how to improve planning for better outcomes in the future. Indeed, it was issues such as these that gave rise to the movement to give individual schools within state systems greater "autonomy" to make their own decisions, which presumably are better decisions for the school and presumably have a greater legitimacy. Self-management is viewed within this paradigm as the ability of some "authority" *at school level* to make decisions about "the allocation of resources (knowledge, technology, power, material, people, time and finance)" (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988:vii). And it is achieved by establishing within the school some such "authority"; preferably in the form of a school council or governing board, composed of staff, parents, pupils and community representatives. In the Australian state of Victoria, all state-run schools have established school councils and this is the trend in the other states. But are these school councils a necessary condition for self-managing schools? Is this really what self-management is all about?

The evidence seems to suggest otherwise, and increasingly, scholars are recognising phenomena within organizations indicating that no matter how management (whether site-based or external) attempts to improve "control", there is an inner dynamic at work capable of resisting such control. They are recognising that organizations exhibit their own autonomy. They go their own ways and "are much less controllable, i.e., subjected to or open to the directing and designing influence of their managing bodies, than is generally accepted" (Malik and Probst 1984:105). This was the case for New Headmaster Stephen Warne when he tried to introduce change. Initially he was unsuccessful and the system stayed the same. It resisted the change he attempted to implement. Then when the system was critically disturbed, and change eventually occurred, it was not in his desired direction, but rather in a different direction. One that originated from within the school itself.

Dermer (1988:25) claims that there is "an ever-increasing body of research urging the recognition of organizational order as *something other than the creation of management*" (my emphasis.). The organizational patterns that are to be found within every real organization (including educational institutions) can never be fully ascribed to the conscious planning and organization of management -- even if that management is "site-based". As Ikin (1989) noted from his study of school councils in Victorian State Schools, in each of the schools he studied, there were individuals, groups and whole sections of the communities "whose efforts were directed towards the maintenance of the status-quo" (p17), and the prevention of change being imposed from without. And he concluded that *current theory is inadequate to explain these self-preservation phenomena* (p15). In fact, within the mechanistic paradigm, such autonomous behaviour must be viewed as organizational pathology.

Knip and van der Vegt (1991:129), in some recent research in the Netherland into how schools respond to central policy intervention, speak of "the way in which the school *fights back* in a situation in which it is externally controlled" (my emphasis). And in my home state of New South Wales (NSW), Kell (1992:4) observed how teachers in the Tertiary And Further Education (TAFE) sector, "failed to view the nature and content of [a restructuring of the sector] as *valid in their own terms*" (my emphasis) so that the said restructuring has been denounced as "a miserable failure" (p6).

All of this implies that somehow "control" is not entirely in the hands of the managers, be they local or in some central authority. The system is somehow exercising its own control. According to the mechanist paradigm, this should not be: the captain must be in control, so such behaviour must be pathological.

But there is another problem with the "ship's crew" model that is not always recognised, and that is that it requires that the captain be fully informed. The quality of his commands will only be as good as the information and knowledge he has available to him upon which he can base those commands. The problem here is identified by von Hayek (in Ulrich, 1984:86) who has observed: "We have in fact learned enough in many fields to know that we cannot know all that we must know for a total interpretation of phenomena." Yet the philosophy of 'still not enough knowledge' is untiringly championed and much effort is squandered within an organization in an attempt to enable management to know things which, if von Hayek is correct, *are essentially unknowable* (Ulrich, 1984:86).

So the problems of management and self-management within the mechanistic paradigm are that it is problematic the extent to which management is able actually to "control" the school in the manner of the captain at the helm. And second, it is problematic that management can ever obtain sufficient information so that it can rationally formulate its "commands" if it wishes to function in this manner. Within the alternative paradigm, however, the dynamic systems paradigm, self-management takes on a different character.

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4. THE HOLISTIC VIEW OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

In the process of looking for a suitable framework within which to investigate the participation of the governing body of an independent school in the life of the school, I found that in recent years, many of the assumptions of the mechanistic paradigm have come under contention. In particular, chaos theory has challenged the validity of a reductionist, mechanistic approach to complex dynamic systems, and the notion that such systems can be understood by analysing them in terms of fundamental parts has had to be questioned. Theories of self-organizing and self-renewing systems (such as the theory of autopoiesis[2]) have also developed over this period, and although developed in the natural sciences, their insights have been broadened to embrace general systems theory, including social systems (such as schools). This new thinking in the natural sciences challenges assumptions about the control, management and governance of systems. While not all scholars accept that these new concepts are applicable in the social domain (for example, Hejl, 1984), others, such as the German Professor of Sociology at Bielefeld University, Niklas Luhmann, see their acceptance as of major importance in that they shift the emphasis of systems theory from *external control* to an understanding of *autonomy* (Luhmann, 1983). And Sungaila (1988(a), 1988(b), 1990) has taken these ideas and adopted them in the field of educational administration.

In this paradigm, a school (like other social systems) is conceptualized first and foremost, as a self-renewing system. Despite changes of staff, students, parents, and members of its governing body (its units at the concrete level of description) and changes in its environment to which it is necessarily open, a school can maintain its identity. Indeed, the theory of autopoietic systems indicates that maintaining its identity is the system's prime purpose. The school is able to maintain its identity because, in spite of these changes, there are structures, analogous to the 'rules of the game', which govern the choices that the school is constantly making, and these structures remain stable. The school is self-referential: it can refer to these structures and make satisfactory (meaningful) choices assuring its self-renewal.

The problem for the school as self-renewing system, is how to maintain its identity -- how to remain recognizably the same (or almost the same) in a constantly changing and increasingly complex world. Using the sporting team metaphor, one would ask how a game of soccer remains recognisably a game of soccer without someone on the side-line choreographing each move as the game progresses. At their concrete level, schools are constantly changing with personnel coming and going almost continually (Cohen and March, 1974), yet, at the abstract level, the communication system (which reflects the school's organizational pattern of relationships) remains identifiably distinct.

4.1. Maintaining an Identity

So how does the school maintain its distinction from the environment in spite of the comings and goings of its personnel? What are the 'rules of the game' that facilitate this process? This is achieved by expectations which *the system itself produces and reproduces* in the choices it communicates and which guide those on-going choices. These expectations are not necessarily, or even usually, defined or made explicit in any specific way; rather, they cluster around various themes and are evoked by various contexts. Within the school, only certain choices become stabilized and expected, and these expectations will guide the choices that are subsequently communicated within the school. Social systems, however, are composed of people who are interacting and who are free to make their own choices. Thus when I interact with you, I cannot expect you to respond according to *some pre-determined*

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[2] The theory of autopoiesis is a general theory about a certain class of systems which are characterised by their ability self-referentially to maintain their identity. While they are open to their environments, in their organizational patterns of relationships, they are self-referentially closed systems.

behaviour: you are not my puppet. I can only expect you to respond according to how *you expect* to respond. Thus I must expect your *expectation* rather than your action, and it is this *expectation of expectation* that will structure our interactions. Similarly, it is structures of expectations of expectations that structure the interactions of a school's personnel.

4.1.1. Expectations of Expectations

The necessity for such second-order expectations arises from what Parsons calls the *"double contingency"* of the social world and the presence of alter egos so that "each actor is *both* acting agent and object of orientation *both* to himself and to the others" (in Luhmann, 1983:994).

Within a situation of simple contingency -- for example, when you or I relate to the physical world -- more or less disappointment-free, stabilized expectancy structures are formed so that we expect that night will follow day; that physical laws will apply more or less uniformly and so on, as pre-determinable facts. But such simple expectations will not suffice in situations of double contingency where ego relates to alter ego. According to Luhmann (1985:40), "the expectability of others' expectations is . . . the founding achievement of human communal living" and it is his claim that structures of expectation of expectation are essential to social systems.

Why is it that expectation of expectation is so important? Why is this reflexive level of expectation so essential to communal living? In the first place, as indicated above, the double contingency of social life means that "the behaviour of the other person cannot be expected to be a determinable fact" (Luhmann, 1985:26), that is, because alter is not a machine or a puppet whose behaviour is pre-determinable, ego cannot expect such mechanical or puppet-like behaviour. Ego must therefore expect alter to base his or her behaviour on his or her own selectivity of possible behaviour. Stephen Warne expected his staff to act according to his wishes in relation to appropriate style of address within his school. His mistake was that he thought they could be engineered, machine-like, to act thus. Rather all that he could expect was the expectation (or otherwise) of his staff to act according to his instructions.

Second, Luhmann (1985:26) claims that it is "necessary in order to control the context of social interaction" so that "everyone can *anticipate* what the other expects of him". An ability to anticipate is time-saving because it avoids the necessity of establishing oneself verbally in normal day-to-day living so that individuals are capable of living with others in very much more complex, behaviourally open systems. Being able to expect others' expectation is the basis for tact (Luhmann, 1985:27): being able to anticipate your expectation reduces my risk of offending.

4.2. Stabilizing Expectations of Expectations

If identity is to be maintained, then these structures of expectations of expectations must be kept stable over what have been identified as the three dimensions of social life -- the temporal (over time), the socio-political (among the social actors), and the material[3] (themes of experience) (see Luhmann, 1985). This means that within the school, no matter when choices are being made, who is making them, and whatever their material content, it will be these stabilized expectations of expectations that will be guiding the choosing.

4.2.1. The Temporal Dimension

[3] The use of the term "material" is, in some respects, unfortunate in that it is not to be confused with its use with respect to a reductionist (or materialist) philosophy. In this context it relates to the material or the subject of interaction, that is, in the sense of what is materially relevant.

Disappointment and surprise are threats to the temporal stability of expectations. When the expectations of expectations which structure the daily life of a school are disappointed by the choice of a member of the school population, that is, when a choice is communicated and presents itself unexpectedly, then the future stability of the expectation is threatened: Was the disappointment merely a breach of the rules of the game (the expected expectations), or do the rules need to be changed? In other words: Can the disappointed expectations of expectations continue to be held? Or do new expectations of expectations which have a greater probability of being disappointment-free, have to be learnt? If the school is to maintain its identity in the future, then disappointment must be dealt with.

There are two ways in which disappointment is handled -- expectations can be adapted to correspond to the disappointing reality, that is, learning can take place and such expectation is said to be held cognitively. Or expectations can continue to be held contrary to the facts as they present themselves, but an explanation must be made to account for the disappointing reality. Such expectation is said to be held normatively.

Many of the expectations that structure a school's daily life, are of the latter kind, and must be maintained in spite of any disappointment. This means that mechanisms must be available which will enable disappointment to be dealt with so that the disappointed expectations can be preserved for the future. Within the school's "culture" there are a number of devices that enable disappointment to be handled. It can be explained away in terms of some myth (or saving story, or stereotype) -- the pupil failed to learn mathematics because she was a girl; it can be dealt with by some ritual (or ceremony) -- the teacher was "carpeted"; or redress can be taken by means of some sanction -- the pupil was suspended. By such means, the disappointment is shown for what it is, and the disappointed expectation of expectation can continue to be held.

4.2.2. The Socio-Political Dimension

The structures of expectations of expectations are stabilized among the school population, in spite of the conflicting expectations of its various interest groups, by means of institutionalization. Within this particular framework, institutionalization has a quite specific meaning and expectations are institutionalized when they are the expectations presumed to be held by unidentifiable third parties within the system, that is, when there is a presumption of consensus concerning those expectations -- these are the expectations that "everyone" (whoever the unidentifiable "everyone" may be) agrees upon.

To maintain the presumption of consensus, the agreed upon expectations need to be communicated among the school. Language is one means of communication, but in situations of increased complexity, there are other more generalized means of communication which have greater chances of success in ensuring that more complex communications are received. Among a social group, and especially one that is essentially political in nature, *power* is such a generalized medium of communication. So power will be used to maintain the presumption of consensus. The head of a school is a power-holder, and he or she has a number of power sources available to heighten the probability of successfully communicating the presumed consensus. For example, the head's formal position as representing the employer is empowering when communicating with staff.

Further, within a school there are people (such as managers) and groups (such as school councils) who make decisions, who set policies, and make plans which are binding upon the school. Such policies, plans and decisions require *legitimacy* and this is achieved by the use of two complementary processes -- symbolically generalized physical force by which the power-holder is able to ensure that decisions, plans, and policies are accepted; and the participation in institutionalized procedures which prevent the symbolically generalized physical force from being used tyrannically. The position of the school council as the super-ordinate unit at the top of the hierarchy endows it with symbolically generalized superior physical force, but its formal meeting procedures, requiring a quorum and matters to be dealt with on a formal agenda, guarantee that such force cannot be used arbitrarily.

4.2.3. The Material Dimension

In the material dimension, these generally accepted, and relatively disappointment-free expectations can be securely stored within various factual meaning contexts within the school -- within its people, the roles they play, the programs they follow and the values they espouse. In this way they are stabilized at varying levels of abstraction and with varying levels of security within the material dimension.

At the most concrete level (and the least secure level) expectations are identified and stored in persons. Obviously, this method of identifying and storing expectations is more suited to small, intimate situations, or where the person is very visible. The charismatic heads of the past were the store-houses for their schools' expectations. Identification and storage in persons involves high risk, however, in that a person can change or disappoint in some particular, and all the expectations stored in that person become threatened.

At the next level of abstraction, expectations are identified and stored in roles which are really limited bundles of expectations not attached to particular people but are assumed by various and changeable role performers. This is more general in that the expectations are stored in the role itself and not in the person performing it; however, the latter still represents a risk to their security.

Programs are verbally fixed rules which define correct action. Not being attached to particular persons or particular roles, there is a greater level of abstraction, and a greater level of security. As complexity increases, so schools are storing more and more expectations in verbally fixed forms -- in handbooks, in aims and philosophies documents, in memoranda, in curriculum documents *etc*, all of which are programs of one kind or another.

Values are the most abstract level at which expectations are identified and stored. It is the most secure level as values are not subject to the whims of a person, or the different ways a role can be performed by differing people, or even to changes made in a program. Their abstraction, however, makes them difficult to identify in the first place, and their generality leaves open many possible actions. For example, schools value learning, but that still leaves open the types of actions which will advance learning.

While these four contexts for the identification and storage of expectations are differentiable, in the normal course of events one does not consciously determine from which context an expectation of expectation is being accessed. Further, the various levels presuppose and determine one another reciprocally: roles presume that there are people to perform them; and people are relieved of individual responsibility by performing roles, for example.

4.3. Self-Management

By these temporally, socio-politically and materially stabilized expectations of expectations, social systems are able to make meaningful choices: choices that can have a consistency of meaning, that can be presumed to be meaningful to all the members of the school, and that are meaningful within the context of the school. And it is by these means that the school achieves its self-renewal, its autopoiesis, and it remains identifiably the same. Through these stabilized structures of expectation, the complexity and contingency of the environment are reduced so that the only choices that are meaningful are those which are referable to these structures of expectations of expectations themselves. Thus, through this process of self-reference, the school is seen to be self-renewing and self-managing by nature.

Self-management, then, is achieved through the self-renewal (autopoietic) mechanisms which have been identified in the stabilized structures of expectations of expectations. But schools also evolve. They change and adapt in response to increased complexity and contingency in their environments. Often this will involve only slight

adjustments to cope with the changed conditions. Occasionally, however, the system will undergo radical transformation resulting in new stabilized structures of expectation and the establishment of a new self-renewing order: such as occurred at City Grammar. This is achieved by the system's self-organizing mechanisms. As self-organization is associated with leadership, this will not be pursued further (it has been explicated in Sungaila (1989(a)) and Beavis (1992)).

I cannot claim that this conceptualization, which, because of its novelty, I have outlined at some length, has been empirically tested to any extent. Malik and Probst (1984:108), however, speak of the evidence in support of similar concepts from what they call "practical trials", and my own research (Beavis, 1992), I believe, provides *prima facie* evidence of its validity and applicability to schools. So I present it as more than mere speculation.

I hope it is clear that self-management is at the very core of this conceptualization. Being a self-referentially closed system with respect to the institutionalized expectations of expectations, managers must be participants within the system. When Stephen Warne attempted to communicate choices outside the institutionalized order, they threatened the presumption of consensus and the system did not respond. The institutionalized order within the NSW TAFE system has been disturbed, but the system is resisting change. The systems are fighting back; they are resisting control; they are displaying self-management. Further, the above also shows that for the system to manage itself, there is no need for knowledge to be centralized into the hands of those in the roles of managers. The institutionalized order provides the self-referential mechanism that guides the action where ever it occurs in the system. Schools, when viewed from within the holistic paradigm, are thus seen to be self-managing by nature: that is a natural characteristic. It is not, therefore, a matter of a school *becoming* self-managing: it *is* self-managing.

5. WHY SCHOOL COUNCILS?

The question that remains, then, is: Why school councils? Why are centralized systems appointing school councils to function within schools? And is this enhancing schools' autonomy? The answer to the third question is "yes" in that the autonomy is qualitatively different. Now in the sporting team model, it cannot be said that the council controls the play. The school as a whole does that through the processes outlined above. The council is no more than a participant with a particular role in the system. This is not to say that the council's role is of little significance. On the contrary, what my research revealed is that the council will enable the school to adopt a second-order mode of functioning, and that is a more successful mode in the face of complexity and contingency. For example, I found that the key process of institutionalization itself is enabled, by a school council, to function at the second-level, because the school council institutionalizes the school's institutions. This means that the structures of expectations of expectations that guide the school's choosing are not merely those that are institutionalized, but rather those that are institutionalized by this particular, differentiated group within the school. The expectations of expectations that are presumed in the school are those that are presumed as being expected by the school council. The process by which the structures of expectations are stabilized is first functioning upon itself before it fulfils its proper function. That may sound like a piece of gobbledegook, but let me assure you that it is in fact very significant. It enables the school to function within an increasingly complex and contingent environment, by enabling it better to co-ordinate itself within such an environment.

It achieves this because, as was noted above, second-level functioning shifts attention from the observed to the observer enabling the latter to be included within its own observations. No longer does the school merely observe itself as distinct from its environment. A council provides the means of observing the observation of that distinction. The school no longer merely sees itself *as distinct from* its environment; it sees itself *in relation to* its environment. The school is able to arrive at an interpretative understanding of

the meanings it gives to its own situations and its interactions with others. The school council is an interpreter (second-order) of the interpretations the school has already given to itself (first-order).

My research led me to conclude that independent schools' *internal* need for survival in the face of increased complexity has led to the differentiation of a legally constituted governing body: there has come a point where these schools' survival have required them to operate at a second-order. It is the contention of this paper that it is this same quest for survival in the face of the increased complexity of their environments that today is leading state schools to operate at a second-order by the introduction of school councils. While it is true that the motivation for the establishment of such councils is not coming from within the schools themselves but rather from the centralized bureaucracies which have previously managed the schools, the fact that they are appearing in increasing numbers is indicative of the fact that the schools themselves are not resisting their establishment. And this new level of functioning is becoming established as schools discover the advantage of their new awareness of their place within their communities.

It may be objected that prior to the introduction of school councils, the central bureaucracy mediated the school/environment distinction. While this is true to some extent, it is held that the centralized bureaucracy was really *in the environment* of any particular school. It was something ***external*** to the school as a social system. It did not assist any particular school to comprehend its particular environment. On the other hand, a school council is *internal*: it is a participant in its own school.

5.1. A State of Becoming

The appointment of school councils, then, enables schools to move from a *first-order self-management* to a *second-order self-management* which enables the school better to function in a more complex environment. This evolutionary step is the *becoming* of self-management. Thus, while schools, as dynamic social systems, always have been, and will always remain, self-managing, it is also true to say that they are *becoming* self-managing.

6. IN CONCLUSION

The movement from first-order operation to second-order operation involves recursion. The output re-enters to become the input. It implies a closure that in earlier times has been symbolized by the snake eating its own tail. The end must be a return to the beginning, and I too must re-enter where I began. I began with the two metaphors for managing systems, the naval ship's crew and the sporting team. These metaphors highlight two paradigms for research -- the mechanistic, reductionist paradigm and the dynamic, holistic paradigm. To claim that the appointment of a school council is to enable a school to become self-managing implies an acceptance of the first paradigm. But self-management in this paradigm is problematic in that it cannot explain the autonomy that social systems display no matter whether they are managed on-site or from some centralized bureaucracy. Further, it is problematic that the manager can ever possess sufficient knowledge to function as desired.

When viewed within the dynamic, holistic paradigm, however, schools are seen to be self-managing whether they have appointed school councils or not. Their self-management is a function of their self-referential closure which is guaranteed by stabilized structures of expectations of expectations which the school itself produces and reproduces. The appointment of school councils, when viewed from this perspective is seen as an evolutionary step which enables the school both to function and to observe itself recursively. Such a second-order mode of operation enables the school not only to operate more effectively in the face of increased complexity and contingency of its environment, but also to relate itself better to that environment.

The practical outcome from all this is that those who are in management positions or on school councils will understand that the complex organizational patterns to be found in every school can never be attributed entirely to conscious planning, organization and management. Rather, they are based on autonomous operating principles of the dynamics of the system, which, if understood, can be entered into in such a way that will avoid much frustration on the part of the manager, and work for the good of the school. And as Malik and Probst (1984:110) point out, the problem is not a question of the advantages or disadvantages of the one paradigm or the other, "but one of the actually possible or impossible."

For those of you for whom the notion of self-reference is repugnant, let me close by reminding you of the self-referential natûre of language itself where meaning is only meaningful in relation to other meaning. Ask yourself the question: What is "language"? According to von Foerster (1984:4-5), "whatever is asked here, it is language we need for an answer; and, of course, we need language to ask that question on language. Hence, if we did not know the answer, how could we have asked the question in the first place? and if we did not know it, what will the answer be like that answers itself?" The escape no doubt lies in the autological nature of language. Which, of course, brings me back to the village barber at the beginning; so I close the loop and re-enter my own discussion!

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